

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A client device that is configured for communications with a multiplicity of other client devices via a communications network, comprising:

means for effecting an advertisement download communication link between the client device and an advertisement distribution server system, via the communications network, at selected advertisement download times;

means for effecting a data communication link with a data communications service provider, via the communications network, wherein the advertisement download communication link and the data communication link are separate communication links;

means for downloading advertisements from the advertisement distribution server system via the advertisement download communication link;

means for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the client device; and

means for displaying at least selected ones of the stored advertisements, in accordance with ad display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system.

2. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein:

each means element comprises respective functions of software installed on the client device; and

the advertisement distribution server system is controlled by a vendor of the software.

3. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the communications network comprises the Internet.

4. The client device as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the software is subsidized by revenues attributable to the downloaded advertisements.

5. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters include at least one of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that it
4 is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;
and

10 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

6. The client device as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the ad display parameters include
2 at least one of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is
4 displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be displayed; and
the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be displayed.

7. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters include
2 at least two of the following parameters:

the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that it
4 is displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;
and

10 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

8. The client device as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the ad display parameters include
2 at least two of the following:

the maximum time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is
4 displayed;

the maximum cumulative time that each stored advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that each stored advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which each stored advertisement should not be displayed; and
the end date/time after which each stored advertisement should not be displayed.

9. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the advertisements include main
2 screen advertisements and toolbar advertisements.

10. The client device as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the advertisements include main
2 screen advertisements and toolbar advertisements.

11. The client device as set forth in Claim 9, wherein the ad display parameters
2 associated with each of the toolbar advertisements include:

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

4 and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

12. The client device as set forth in Claim 10, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include the following parameters associated with each of the toolbar advertisements:

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

4 and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

13. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the means for displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements displays the at least selected ones of the stored
advertisements in a linear manner.

14. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the means for displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements displays the at least selected ones of the stored
advertisements in a random manner.

15. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the means for displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements displays the at least selected ones of the stored
advertisements in a linear sequence according to the order in which the advertisements are
4 stored on the storage medium.

16. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the means for displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements displays the at least selected ones of the stored
advertisements in an order prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system.

17. The client device as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the ad display parameters are
2 prescribed by a vendor of the software.

18. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, further comprising means for monitoring
2 user activity, wherein:

at least one of the ad display parameters is a face time duration parameter that specifies
4 a face time duration for at least one of the stored advertisements;

the means for displaying at least selected ones of the stored advertisements displays
6 the at least selected ones of the stored advertisements for the face time duration prescribed by
the associated face time duration parameter; and

8 the face time duration comprises a time period during which at least a prescribed
minimum level of user activity is detected.

19. The client device as set forth in Claim 18, wherein the user activity comprises any
2 user action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

20. The client device as set forth in Claim 18, wherein the user activity comprises any user action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen associated with the client device.

21. The client device as set forth in Claim 18, wherein the user activity comprises any of the following user actions:

movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
use of an input device associated with the client device.

22. The client device as set forth in 18, wherein the user activity comprises any of the following user actions:

movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client device.

23. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify, for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, how many times that advertisement is to be displayed for a given time period, and how long that advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed.

24. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify, for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, how many times that advertisement is to be displayed for a given time period.

25. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify, for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, how long that advertisement is to be displayed each time that it is displayed.

26. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters specify, for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, a start

date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed, and the end
4 date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

27. The client device as set forth in Claim 23, wherein the ad display parameters
2 specify, for each of the prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, a
start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed, and the end
4 date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.

28. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters
2 specify, for each of prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, the
total/cumulative amount of time that advertisement is to be displayed.

29. The client device as set forth in Claim 23, wherein the ad display parameters
2 specify, for each of the prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, the
total/cumulative amount of time that advertisement is to be displayed.

30. The client device as set forth in Claim 27, wherein the ad display parameters
2 specify, for each of the prescribed ones of the at least selected ones of the advertisements, the
total/cumulative amount of time that advertisement is to be displayed.

31. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be displayed:

a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time
4 that it is displayed;

a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

6 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

8 the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;
and

10 the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

wherein the face time comprises a time period during which a prescribed minimum
12 level of user activity occurs.

32. The client device as set forth in Claim 31, further comprising means for
2 monitoring user activity to detect whether the prescribed minimum level of user activity has
occurred.

33. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the means for downloading
2 advertisements downloads advertisements identified in at least one playlist generated by at
least one playlist server.

34. The client device as set forth in Claim 33, further comprising:
2 means for generating a cookie containing information describing user/client device
behavior and/or user demographics; and
4 means for transmitting the cookie to the at least one playlist server.

35. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the ad display parameters
2 include any one or more of the following parameters for each advertisement to be displayed:
a maximum face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time
4 that it is displayed; and
a maximum cumulative face time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;
6 wherein the face time comprises a time period during which a prescribed minimum
level of user activity occurs.

36. The client device as set forth in Claim 35, further comprising means for
2 monitoring user activity to detect whether the prescribed minimum level of user activity has
occurred.

37. The client device as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the user activity comprises any
2 user action that is indicative of user interaction with the software.

38. The client device as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the user activity comprises any user action that is indicative of the user viewing a display screen associated with the client device.

39. The client device as set forth in Claim 35, wherein the user activity comprises any of the following user actions:

movement of a pointer device associated with the client device; and
use of an input device associated with the client device.

40. The client device as set forth in 35, wherein the user activity comprises any of the following user actions:

movement of a mouse associated with the client device;
clicking of a mouse button associated with the mouse; and
movement of one or more keys of a keyboard associated with the client device.

41. The client device as set forth in Claim 33, wherein the at least one playlist is customized to the user/client device.

42. The client device as set forth in Claim 33, wherein the at least one playlist is tailored to the user/client device.

43. The client device as set forth in claim 34, wherein the at least one playlist is generated by the at least one playlist server for the user/client device based at least partially on the information contained in the cookie.

44. The client device as set forth in Claim 33, wherein the at least one playlist is generated by the at least one playlist server based at least partially on user demographics and/or user/client device behavior.

45. The client device as set forth in Claim 33, wherein:

2 each means element comprises respective functions of software installed on the client
device; and

4 the at least one playlist server is controlled by a vendor of the software.

46. The client device as set forth in Claim 2, wherein the software is e-mail software.

47. The client device as set forth in Claim 45, wherein the software is e-mail software

48. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the data communications service
2 provider is an e-mail service provider.

49. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the data communications service
2 provider is an Internet service provider.

50. The client device as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the means for displaying at least
2 selected ones of the stored advertisements comprises displays the at least selected ones of the
stored advertisements when the client device is offline.

51. A client device that is configured for communications with a multiplicity of other
2 client devices via a communications network, comprising:

means for effecting an advertisement download communication link between the
4 client device and an advertisement distribution server system, via the communications
network, at selected advertisement download times;

6 means for effecting a data communication link with a data communications service
provider, via the communications network, wherein the advertisement download
8 communication link and the data communication link are separate communication links;

means for downloading advertisements from the advertisement distribution server
10 system via the advertisement download communication link;

means for storing downloaded advertisements on a storage medium associated with the
12 client device; and

means for displaying at least selected ones of the stored advertisements, in accordance
14 with ad display parameters prescribed by the advertisement distribution server system,

wherein:

16 each means element comprises respective functions of software installed on the client
device;

18 the communications network comprises the Internet; and

the ad display parameters include at least one of the following parameters:

20 the maximum time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed each time that it
is displayed;

22 the maximum cumulative time that the associated advertisement is to be displayed;

24 the maximum number of times per day that the associated advertisement is to be
displayed;

the start date/time before which the associated advertisement should not be displayed;

26 and

the end date/time after which the associated advertisement should not be displayed.